

Govern Building  
35-43 North Jefferson Avenue  
Canonsburg  
Washington County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5368

HABS  
PA  
63-CANON,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Mid-Atlantic Region, National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS  
PA  
63-CANON  
2-

## Gowern Building (Commercial Building)

HABS No. PA-5368

Location: 35-43 North Jefferson Avenue  
Canonsburg, Washington County, PA 15317

USGS Canonsburg Quadrangle, Universal Mercator  
Coordinates: E568970/N4456660

Present Owner: Joseph M. and Edythe C. Massack, his wife, and  
Gloria F. Capozzi

Present Occupants: Fartro Maytag Sales and Service  
Personal items in storage owned by Donald Fox

### Statement of Significance:

The Gowern Building is an example of early Twentieth century architecture which contributes to the commercial historic district in downtown Canonsburg. The simple classical commercial design of the two-story ocher brick building is characterized by a corbelled parapet wall and sandstone trim.

## ***PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION***

### **A. Physical History:**

1. Date of Erection: 1903 (Headstone)
2. Architect: "Not known"
3. Original and subsequent owners:
  - 1903 William J. Govern owner at time of construction and subsequently willed to family members at his death in 1935.
  - 1954 Deed, December 16, 1954, recorded January 14, 1955, Deed Book 918 page 113. Alice M. Govern, Florence Govern, and May Govern to Elizabeth Govern, Eileen Govern Kaier, and Margaret Govern Ritchie.
  - 1967 Deed, May 8, 1967, recorded May 26, 1967, Deed Book 1258 page 380. Elizabeth Govern, Eileen Govern Kaier, and Margaret Govern Ritchie to Joseph J. Koklich, Jr., Frances Koklich, Joseph M. Massack and Edythe C. Massack.
  - 1987 Deed, April 30, 1987, recorded May 20, 1987, Deed Book 2282 page 505. Joseph J. Koklich, Jr., Frances Koklich, Joseph M. Massack and Edythe C. Massack to Joseph M. Massack and Edythe C. Massack
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans are available. It is believed that the two-story ocher brick building with sandstone trim has been altered very little since its construction.

6. Alterations and additions: Two 16 feet by 25 feet, one (1) story block additions were constructed at an unknown date. These are extensions of the storerooms on either end of the original building and into rear yard areas. These additions have flat sloped roofs covered with tar. The interiors are unfinished with tongue and groove wood flooring and masonite ceilings. Finally a one-story brick and frame building was also added at an unknown date next to storeroom address 41 N. Jefferson Avenue. It is eight (8) feet wide and forty-two (42) feet deep. It was used as an insurance office. It had a front and rear entrance.

## **B. Historical Context:**

The Gowern Building of 1903 was a two story brick structure located at 35-43 North Jefferson Avenue, Canonsburg, Washington County, Pennsylvania. It was built in 1903 by William J. Gowern, a very prominent and wealthy businessman, who was probably the largest individual real estate owner in Canonsburg.

Mr. Gowern was born in the City of New York, December 5, 1853, the son of Robert F. and Alice (Robinson) Gowern. At the age of three, his parents moved to Harrodsburg, Kentucky, and there he attended school until he was thirteen years of age. The family then moved to Paterson, New Jersey, where he received a few months of schooling and began to work in a cotton mill as a bobbin boy. From here, William moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and served a two year apprenticeship in the carriage painting trade under the employ of John S. Shaffer. Then it was on to Washington, Pennsylvania where he worked for S. B. & C. Hays as a journeyman painter from the age of nineteen to twenty-one. It was at this time in 1875 that he accompanied his father and brother, Robert F. Jr., to Canonsburg where they went into the carriage-making business under the firm name of Gowern and Sons.

The Gowern carriage works began on a modest scale in a small frame building which their prosperous business eventually outgrew. In 1886, the firm erected a large three story brick factory on the corner of North Jefferson Avenue and West Pike Street to house their manufacturing and sales operations. A year later, the two sons purchased their father's interest in the business and also his large real estate interests. The firm then became known as the Gowern

Brothers and the business was expanded to include harness and horse goods. On May 24, 1895, one of the brothers, Robert F. Jr. , died and the surviving partner and brother, William J., continued the business without change until November 14, 1898. During this period, the Gowerns also erected three small frame buildings along North Jefferson Avenue adjacent to the factory. These frame buildings were rented to other businesses such as a barbershop, shoemaker shop and news depot.

One November 14, 1898, Canonsburg experienced the most devastating fire in its history to date. The fire started about 2:00 a.m. in a small frame building behind the Gowern properties and within a few hours, at least thirty buildings in the downtown were destroyed including the Gowern carriage factory and adjacent commercial buildings. The Gowern Carriage Works was never reestablished after the fire, but one year later, William J. Gowern erected a three story brick storeroom and office building on the site of the carriage factory. Men's and women's clothing shops occupied the first floor storerooms with offices on the upper floors. Adjacent to this new building and on the site of the three frame commercial buildings, William J. erected another building which has been known as the Gowern Building of 1903. It had postal addresses of 35-43 North Jefferson Avenue. This two story brick structure had four storerooms on the first floor and sleeping rooms above. Mr. Gowern had a real estate and insurance sales office in one of the storerooms which he operated under the name of Morgan & Gowern, a partnership formed with John C. Morgan in November of that year. In 1906, Mr. Morgan was elected County Treasurer of Washington County and the business partnership was dissolved leaving Mr. Gowern to conduct the business alone. The other storerooms were occupied by the New Crystal Cafe, which also offered hotel accommodations in the second floor sleeping rooms, B. Trilecz & Company as steamship agent and banker, and finally a fruit and vegetable market owned by John Graff.

On July 10, 1901, William J. Gowern was married to Miss Margaret I. Conboy, a daughter of John Conboy of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and they had three children: Elizabeth, Eileen, and Margaret. Mr. Gowern's death occurred on October 19, 1935 at the age of 82 years.

The property on which these Gowern buildings were erected was purchased by Robert F. Gowern, Sr. and his sons, Robert F., Jr. and William J., on February 7, 1878 from John and Jane B. Thome of Canonsburg. The property remained in the Gowern family until May 8, 1967 when it was conveyed from Elizabeth Gowern, Eileen Gowern Kaier, and Margaret Gowern Ritchie, to Joseph J. Koklich, Jr. Frances Koklich, Joseph Massack and Edythe Massack.

## **PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

### **A. General Statement**

1. Architectural Character: Early twentieth century architecture. The simple classical commercial design of the two story ocher brick building is characterized by a corbelled parapet wall and sandstone trim
2. Condition of Fabric: The building is in general disrepair.

### **B. Description of Exterior**

1. Overall Dimensions: The original two story structure had overall dimensions of 67 feet in width and 42 feet in depth. The structure was subdivided into four (4) equal size storeroom units. The 16 feet by 25 feet one (1) story additions were on the two end units. The second floor was divided into two similar apartment units entered from a central stairway at the front of the building.
2. Foundations: Brick and stone foundation. Basement has concrete floor.
3. Walls: Brick
4. Structures Systems, Framing: Wood floor joists (2" x 10")
5. Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkheads: None.
6. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys on roof, three (3) feet high and one and one half (1-1/2) feet square.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and Doors: Four individual entry doors are provided on the front and back walls to the individual storeroom units. In addition a doorway on the front wall provides access to the stairway to the second floor. All front doors are wood with light panels, all rear doors are solid wood.
- b. Windows and Shutters: Wood double hung windows.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, Covering: Flat, tar and pitch
- b. Cornice, Eaves: None
- c. Dormers, Cupolas, Towers: None

**C. Description of Interior:**

- 1. Floor Plans: No original design or as built drawings of the building are available. Included herein are sketch plan line drawings of the building interior for the first and second floors.
- 2. Stairways: Front wooded stairway to second floor.
- 3. Flooring: Wooden tongue and groove floor natural stain and varnish. Tile floors in kitchen areas of second floor apartments.
- 4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Plaster walls and ceilings painted. Wainscoting on walls of kitchen in apartment No. 1.
- 5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and Doors: Solid wood doors.
  - b. Windows: None
- 6. Decorative Features and Trim: None



7. Hardware: None

8. Mechanical Equipment:

- a. Heating, Air Conditioning, Ventilation: Separate gas space heater in each storeroom. Gas space heater with heat runs in apartment No. 1 and two (2) space heaters in apartment No. 2.
- b. Lighting: Incandescent knob and tube system.
- c. Plumbing: First floor - 1/2" copper for pressure lines, pvc plastic for drain lines.  
Second floor - Galvanized pressure lines, cast iron drains.

**D. Site:**

- 1. General Setting and Orientation: The front of the building faces east. The structure is located in the Canonsburg downtown area among buildings of similar construction and vintage. The topography is flat. Access to the building is gained from North Jefferson Avenue. The site is void of vegetation.
- 2. Historic Landscape Design: None
- 3. Outbuildings: None

### **PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

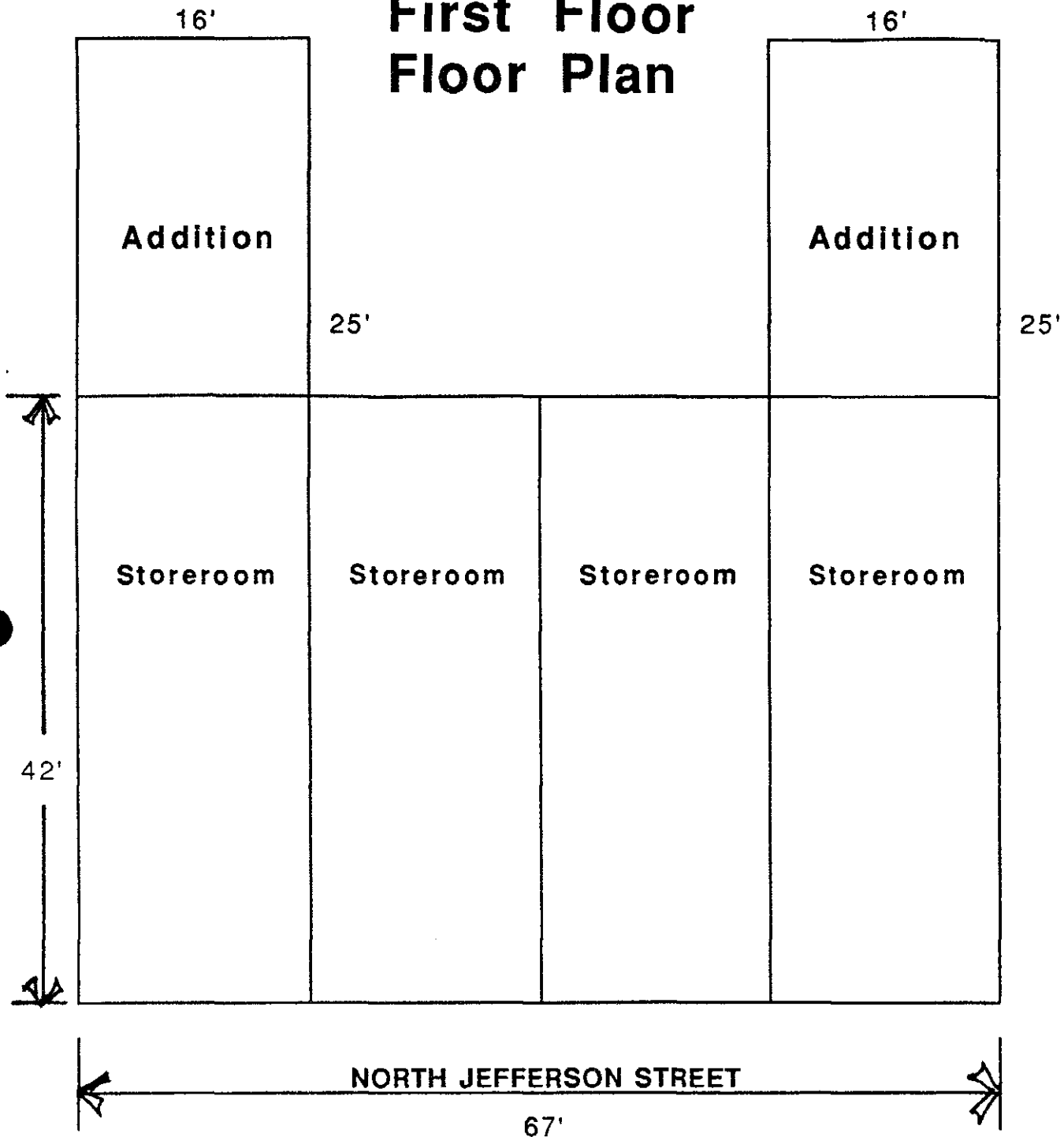
- A. Architectural Drawings:** None available
- B. Historic Views:** None available
- C. Interviews:** James T. Heron, Canonsburg resident and member of the Jefferson College Historical Society.
- D. Bibliography:** R.L. Polk & Co.  
Washington Directory  
Canonsburg Volume VI  
1909-1910  
  
20th Century History of Washington County  
by Joseph F. McFarland  
  
Jefferson College Times  
Jefferson College Historical Society  
Volume XX Number 2 (Whole #72) May, 1987  
  
James T. Herron  
Canonsburg Resident and Member of the  
Jefferson College Historical Society
- E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:** None known
- F. Supplemental Material:** None

## ***PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION***

It is the intent of this project to demolish the Gowern Building (Commercial Building) and to use the cleared land for off street parking. The project costs are being funded by the Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Prepared by:	Edward F. Geubtner
Title:	City Planner
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Date:	June 24, 1988

# First Floor Floor Plan

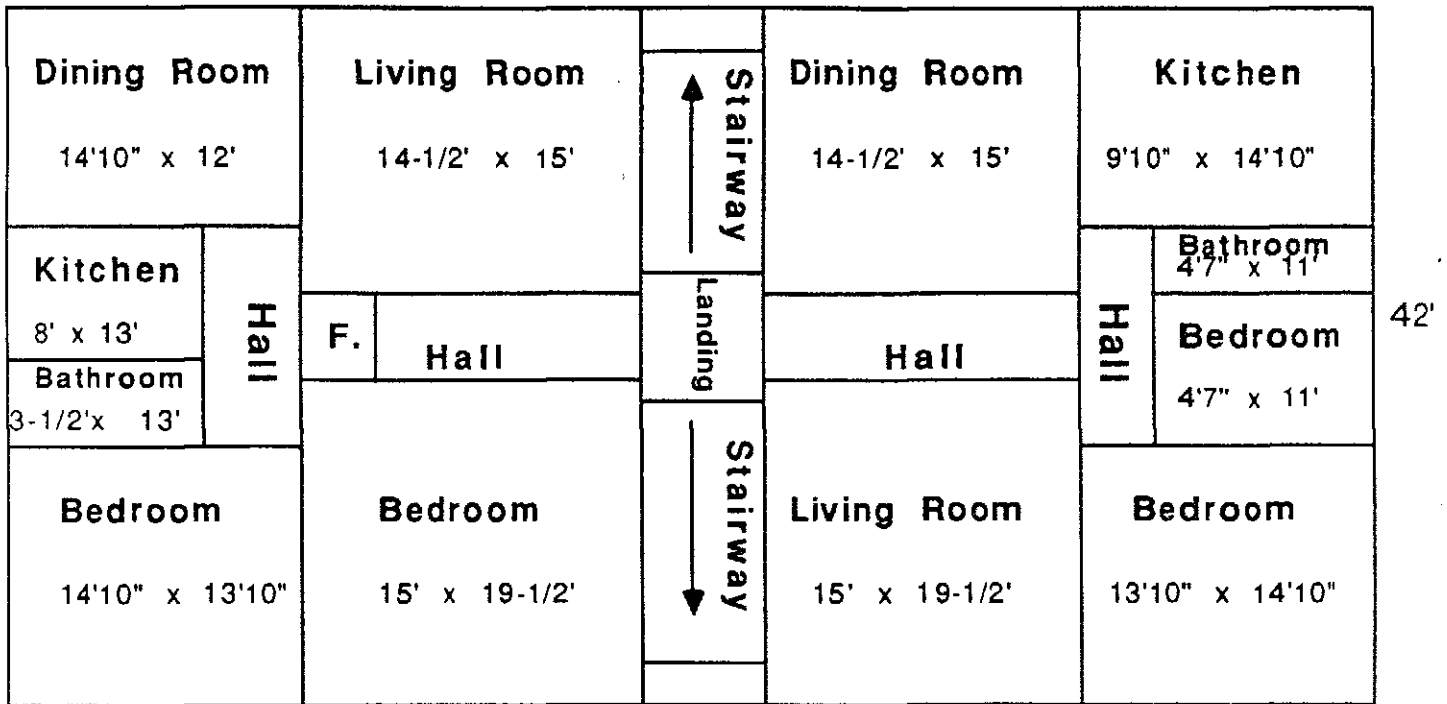


Storeroom Area = 2,814 Sq. Ft.  
Addition Area = 800 Sq. Ft.

NORTH →

\* Drawing Not To Scale  
June, 1988

## FLOOR PLAN SECOND FLOOR APARTMENTS



Apartment No. 1

67'

Apartment No. 2

**North Jefferson Street**

AREA - 2,814 SQ. FT.

\* NOTE: Drawing not to scale.

June, 1988

